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INTELLIGENCE MEMORANDUM

THE NATO CRISIS IN ITS POLITICAL SETTING

DIRECTORATE OF INTELLIGENCE
Office of Current Intelligence

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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY
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INTELLIGENCE MEMORANDUM

The NATO Crisis in its Political Setting

Summary

1. No crisis of major policy has been more heralded than the one which has now come to a head in NATO. Since De Gaulle returned to power in 1958 and especially since the end of the Algerian war, he has said every few months that he intended to effect a major reconstitution of the Alliance. Yet, now that the crisis has come, it has had its surprising aspects, and what precisely the issues are all about --let alone, how they will be ultimately resolved-- is far from clear. Despite the show of unanimity which other NATO members have been able to sustain, important differences of opinion exist within and among them, and each now faces an appalling long list of decisions to be taken on issues which are vital to its national interest.

2. That the Alliance is now caught with no consensus on how to deal with the crisis is understandable. In the first place, NATO has symbolized the US relationship to Western Europe for 17 years, and as a military enterprise, it has been highly successful. In the eyes of many of its members, the original reasons for the establishment of NATO remain valid, and they see no reason now for any change. In the second place, despite some seven years of calculated build-up, De Gaulle has left his position still shrouded in ambiguity. He has kept open a wide range of possible courses of action; it is not clear precisely what he wants or what he will settle for-- nor is it known what he will do if he is frustrated.

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Third, while the crisis has taken on the aspect of a US-France confrontation, neither country alone will determine the outcome. In the last few weeks, London has often taken the lead. The basic issue may in fact be France's relations with West Germany, and the settlement of this issue may hinge on trends within the Erhard government. Finally, this is surely only the beginning of the crisis and one which ultimately involves not only NATO, but a much broader range of questions--the balance of power in Western Europe, its future organization, US relations with Europe across the spectrum, and Western Europe's relations with the Soviet bloc.

The Case for NATO

3. Perhaps a major difficulty of the moment is the "theology" with which each side may be tempted to view the crisis. De Gaulle alleges he is fighting against Alliance "integration" which is the equivalent of "subordination." Aside from the fact that De Gaulle has never behaved like one subordinated, integration has had no great impact on national control over national forces in peacetime, and was, for example, no obstacle at all to France's conduct of the war in Algeria. De Gaulle also alleges that Alliance ties may drag Europe into wars of US making. In fact, we have found it utterly impossible on the one hand to obtain any commitment of European military forces to the war in South Vietnam, and on the other, it is one of De Gaulle's favorite boasts that France was among the first to take a stand at the US side in the Cuban missile crisis. De Gaulle has likewise held that the American doctrine of flexible response deprives Europe of a nuclear guarantee. This, however, does not prevent him from also holding that there is no longer any real threat of war in Europe, and he has proceeded to take NATO apart in full knowledge that the US nuclear umbrella makes it safe for him to do so.

4. But, the insistence that NATO is effective only because it is Atlantic, multilateral, and integrated may likewise be less than the complete story. In actuality, important aspects of US defense relations with Western Europe have remained bilateral--an historic example of this was the cancellation in 1963 of the joint development with Britain of the

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Skybolt missile and the subsequent offer of Polaris to sustain the British deterrent. Vital aspects of the Alliance which could perhaps be multilateralized and integrated have not been--instead of a thorough-going NATO common weapons program, for example, vigorous national competition has often been the case. Whatever the political value of the multilateral mutual defense commitment in the North Atlantic Treaty, everyone knows that the real guarantee of Europe's security is the unilateral recognition by the US that its security forbids the acquisition of Western Europe's industrial machine by the Soviet Union. Moreover, while the issue has on occasion been portrayed as Gaullist "innovation" as opposed to US "stand-pattism," the US has on two notable occasions been the innovator: in 1954, when we ardently supported the European Defense Community in order to obtain a commitment of German manpower to NATO, and in the last few years when we have sought through the multilateral force to give Bonn an indirect access to nuclear weaponry.

5. None of this is to suggest that there is no case for NATO, but rather, that the case is primarily a practical one:

(a) It provides in the first place a necessary margin of military safety. Many who would agree with De Gaulle that the likelihood of direct Soviet aggression in Western Europe has greatly declined are far less willing than he to act so boldly on the basis of that calculation. Soviet politics remain too obscure, the nuclear standoff is too recent, Khrushchev's attempt to neutralize the US deterrent is too fresh a memory, and there is always the chance of a technological breakthrough. So long as this uncertainty exists, NATO remains a practical military necessity. It makes it possible for the second-, third-, and fourth-rate European powers to organize a collective defense far superior to their individual capabilities. There is likewise something to be said for the argument that the integrated command and planning structure in NATO has supplied what was missing--nearly disastrously so--in 1914 and 1940.

(b) The North Atlantic Treaty and its organization also provide Europe an assurance of US

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support which is politically and psychologically necessary. The Gaullists argue that in Europe's last two wars the US intervened only at the eleventh hour. They also hold that the North Atlantic Treaty's mutual defense commitments could not be made automatic and categorical because of the US Constitution. The US answer to this is that the American presence in Europe--and above all, the integrated structure--is an assurance of certain US involvement in any future war. Since the Gaullists wish to dismantle this practical guarantee, it is evidently of little value to them, but it remains of value to others who may in fact be concerned that a US involvement elsewhere, a rebirth of US isolationism, or a budget-cutting orgy might leave Europe overly exposed.

(c) Above all, the reactions of the past three weeks have demonstrated that in the circumstances which now prevail NATO remains an essential element in the political stability of Western Europe itself. It is inconceivable that Europe in the 1950s could have mounted a viable defense without the re-emergence of West Germany with a preponderance of power, nor is it conceivable that any one European power or any combination of powers could have been trusted to wield the nuclear deterrent which the US contributed. Fear of Germany caused the agonizing over the European Defense Community and made essential the network of alternative agreements--the London and Paris agreements--under which a contribution of German manpower was eventually achieved. It was precisely this raw nerve which the MLF also touched upon--and it has now been set loudly jangling again by De Gaulle's moves to disengage France from NATO. Almost with one voice, the other Alliance members have noted that an isolated France would leave Germany the major power on the Continent--unless the US becomes even more deeply committed in Western Europe, the UK irrevocably crosses the Channel, or everyone joins in effecting the demilitarization of Germany, perhaps in the context of reunification.

The Ambiguity of De Gaulle

6. That it is possible to conceive of such consequences eventuating from the present crisis is indicative not only of the essentially political character

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of De Gaulle's challenge, but also of its obscurity. For a year or more, there have been authoritative leaks to the effect that De Gaulle would propose certain reforms in the Alliance, and some of these leaks have been quite detailed indeed. In the end, of course, he did not propose any reforms, but merely stated what he intended France to do. Presumably this is a matter of tactics--perhaps a lesson learned from the failure to obtain the revisions in the EEC treaty which De Gaulle so clearly wanted when he launched the boycott of the Common Market in mid-1965. But does it also mean--as De Gaulle suggested in his 11 March aides-memoire--that he has downgraded the prospects of achieving such "reforms"? There are also the questions raised by his reassurance that he intends France to remain a member of the North Atlantic Treaty after April 1969, when Paris could legally announce an intention to withdraw. De Gaulle is presumed to want a network of interlocking bilateral agreements, and there have been reports that when the present decisions were being considered, he contemplated denouncing the treaty at this time. Instead he has said France will remain a member provided existing conditions do not change, and will fight at the side of its allies provided an aggression against them is unprovoked. Thus, he has retained a multilateral commitment, but unilaterally weakened and reinterpreted it--and kept open the option of leaving altogether if it should so suit him later on.

7. There are other obscurities of perhaps more immediate practical importance. Although Couve de Murville has said that France intends likewise to retain its seat on the North Atlantic Council, it would not participate when military matters are under discussion. The question is under what terms would it continue to sit--for what specific purposes, with what security arrangements, and with how great a willingness to permit the other 14 members to proceed with decisions of which France disapproved. Presumably the French intend to withdraw from the Standing Group--NATO's military authority--but they have not said so, and have referred vaguely to their offer to establish some kind of liaison between French and NATO commands. What about continued French participation in NATO's early warning system on which the force de frappe is

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dependent--and the air defense ground environment system, the equally vital and largest of the NATO infrastructure projects? Would De Gaulle be willing to bargain French airspace in return for such participation?

8. An especially crucial question is the future of the French forces in West Germany which De Gaulle says he is "disposed" to keep there under the provisions of the London and Paris agreements of 1954. These are the agreements which formally terminated the occupation of West Germany, but gave the three Western powers certain residual powers, admitted Germany to the Western European Union, and paved the way for its accession to NATO under provisions controlling its rearmament. Bonn takes the position that these agreements are of one part with decisions taken at the same time making NATO the executor of parts of the WEU arrangements and committing to NATO the forces created under the WEU. Thus, if the French wish their forces to remain in West Germany but withdraw them from commitment to NATO, then new agreements will have to be negotiated and new conditions decided. Among these might be some commitment to a forward defense, agreement to joint peacetime planning for these forces with SACEUR, and a guarantee that they would come under SACEUR's command in wartime.

9. Whether and under what conditions it would be desirable for the French to remain in West Germany is debatable and there are many arguments pro and con. In general, those who believe it should be made as difficult for the French to remain as possible suggest that these forces have little military value, that De Gaulle is claiming special privileges for them which would rapidly be claimed by others and which he is unwilling to accord the Germans in France, and that the negotiation of special arrangements with France would tend to dilute Germany's cooperation with its other NATO partners. Those who feel it should be made possible for the French to stay argue that their forces, however weak, would have to be compensated for if withdrawn, that the French might become difficult in West Berlin, and above all, that a showdown between Bonn and Paris on the issue would wreck 20 years of effort to reconcile the two.

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On balance, most of the US missions in Europe have cautioned against bringing on such a showdown. Ambassador Cleveland, for example, has held that since it is the objective to hold the Alliance together, without France if necessary, to maintain NATO's military effectiveness and its solidarity, and to avoid an irrevocable banishment of France, then the Alliance should set terms in accordance with its intrinsic requirements--avoiding either too provocative or too conciliatory a stance. Then if the French withdraw it might be possible to minimize the damage, or repair it, after De Gaulle.

The Other Players

10. The consequence of all this--as it was in the Common Market crisis--is that Bonn has emerged once more in a pivotal role. On the one hand the situation is one which may seem to offer to Bonn enormous temptations--merely by playing it cool it can occupy the seats being vacated by the French in the NATO commands, or at least a part of them; the desire of the remaining members to strengthen the Alliance can be counted on to reopen the question of nuclear sharing--it has in fact already been reopened; and time and necessity might seem likely to bring further into question the validity of the 1954 restraints on German rearmanent. On the other hand, however, the situation must also appear to Bonn to be one in which there is still a good chance that it is the German ox which is most likely to be gored. If NATO disintegrates, it is German security which is in the first instance affected by doing nothing; Bonn is already the butt of a new wave of anti-German suspicion, and France has not yet turned up its propaganda machine; and, if the going really gets rough, Bonn must always reflect on what De Gaulle might conceivably do in Moscow next June.

11. So far at least, Bonn appears to be guided by a fairly realistic assessment of its primary interests--and by a healthy realization of the limitations which restrict its assumption of any leadership role. One official has suggested, it is true, that Bonn should perhaps take the position that the WEU agreements have already been invalidated, but this idea has not been taken up. Another has also played

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up the nuclear sharing theme, and still others have been eager for tripartite US-UK-German consultations on how to deal with the crisis--despite the questionable timing of raising the one issue and the delicacy of pushing the other. For the most part, however, government and opposition alike have publicly reiterated that the German interest requires an integrated NATO, that any negotiations on the French forces in Germany will be preceded by consultations with other members of the Alliance, and that the main German requirement is nondiscrimination.

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12. If, on the one hand, Bonn has moved with notable caution, London has, on the other, seemed engaged in an atypical display of "hawkism" in defense of the Alliance. Immediately after De Gaulle's letters of 7 March the British proposed a foreign ministers' meeting to draft a declaration of support for NATO, and when the others were skeptical of such a gathering, the British were instrumental in pushing the declaration through rump sessions of the NATO representatives in Paris. This display of energy has caused some amazement and even occasional resentment on the Continent, but the reasons for it are fairly obvious. Basically, the British are the "standpatters" par excellence so far as the Alliance is concerned--they do not want it to change. London sees NATO as the necessary vehicle for continued US involvement in Europe and therefore an element of stability; it also sees NATO as a means of extending Britain's influence in Europe because of its "special relationship" to the US; lacking participation in the European communities, Britain also sees NATO as a point of contact between the UK and Europe; and,

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These are the basic considerations for London which--together with the electoral campaign, the long-standing suspicion of De Gaulle which has animated the British Embassy in Paris, and Britain's continued embarrassment over its exclusion from the EEC--add up to the eager and spirited defense of NATO which has so far come from London.

13. But, reservations as to the precise identity of US and British views regarding every aspect of the crisis of the Alliance and how it should be handled may still be in order. In his press conference on 15 March, Heath took the view that after 20 years it was unrealistic to expect the Alliance to remain precisely the same, that it is time now to redress the balance between the US and Europe in NATO, and that, rather than "bellyache," the other members should sit down with the French and work out a new NATO structure. The embassy in London believes that Heath may have been carried away to a certain extent by election fever, but he has often in the past emphasized that the UK's future is in Europe and not in the Atlantic framework. Moreover, within the Conservative Party, there are a number of others--Thorneycroft is one--who are activated by a more clearly Gaullist spirit, which includes a strong admixture of anti-American feeling. As for Labor, the desire for disarmament and distrust of Germany are real and lively feelings. Those feelings will be acutely sensitive to any indelicacy of German diplomacy; they will be even less likely than before the crisis to see any advantage in a hardware solution to nuclear sharing. If Paris shows any signs of wavering, London may see greater advantage in pragmatic arrangements to keep the French tied in some way to NATO than in standing on theology. In this connection, London may be wont to recall how it "saved the situation" after the collapse of the EDC.

14. What generalization can be made about the other 11 members? Only that they all approved the draft declaration in support of NATO, that the declaration probably reflects a kind of generality of support for the Alliance, that there are nonetheless important differences of view among them, and that support of the declaration now does not indicate where each country will stand as the crisis drags on. Canada remains sensitive to its Quebec problem, but even before the present crisis the Pearson government

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had talked about the need to reconstitute the Alliance more along partnership lines. The Moro government is strongly pro-NATO, but Italy is also an EEC partner of France, distrust of German aspirations is fairly widespread, and there is a Gaullist faction in Rome. The Italian Army is, of course, concerned that a withdrawal of France from the Alliance would isolate it from direct contact with the NATO establishment in northern Europe. In the Benelux countries, the Dutch are sturdy, Luxembourg has high hopes of hosting some of the military headquarters which are ousted from France, and Belgium--with its new center-right government--is somewhat an unknown quantity. In Scandinavia, distrust of German preeminence, ties with Britain, and a latent interest in a purely Scandinavian defense arrangement may be considerations for the future, but the new Norwegian Government has apparently been surprised by the extent of parliamentary support for NATO it has discovered. On the southern flank, Portugal eventually approved the 14-nation declaration, but publicly dissociated itself from its spirit, and will in the future be at best a sensitive and critical participant in any common front against De Gaulle. Nor as a result of the Cyprus dispute is there any white heat of devotion to NATO as such in either Greece or Turkey, although it is doubtful that either has any other place to go.

Keys to the Scripture

15. On balance it would therefore appear that we face in NATO a crisis of indeterminate length and uncertain outcome--and one which has the potential for changing in a massive way the whole European outlook. The great obstacles to understanding it, let alone predicting its outcome, are the great number of interlocking variables--the theology which has built up--and the absence, so to speak, of "keys to the scripture." Instead, there are key questions to which there are as yet no satisfactory answers--among them:

(a) Will we be dealing with the same kind of government in France when all these questions are answered as we are now when they are raised? The British have been eager to have the Alliance take a firm stand, at least in part, because of their belief that there is latent opposition to De Gaulle which will be brought to the fore. There is also the view that if we string out the negotiations long enough, the Lord

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may intervene--on our side. So far at least, effective opposition to De Gaulle has yet to materialize in France, the parliamentary elections are still a year away, and even an anti-Gaullist majority would not necessarily be a united opposition. But, the fact remains that De Gaulle is an old man, that Gaullism is De Gaulle to a very considerable extent, that he mistook prior to the December elections how much pro-European sentiment there was in France, and that he may now have made the same mistake with NATO.

(b) But assuming the world is stuck with De Gaulle for the foreseeable future, is he still working toward some alternative to NATO, or is his aim merely to destroy what now exists? In the early 1960s, De Gaulle advocated a system for coordinating the foreign and defense policies of the six Common Market countries, and when he failed to obtain their consent, he tried to animate the project by beginning bilaterally with the Germans. Does he still believe there is a chance of reviving this conception of a European defense arrangement out of the chaotic conditions he will have created in the Alliance, or is he willing to settle now merely for the disengagement, neutralization, and/or isolation of France?

(c) Is it possible that De Gaulle is now working--primarily out of fear of eventual German hegemony on the Continent--toward a definitive settlement of the German question, a settlement which, he would hope, would keep Germany permanently subordinated? Many consider it paradoxical that, given the signs of De Gaulle's growing animus toward Bonn, he would seek to destroy both the European and Atlantic arrangements which were designed to keep the Germans in tow. But, with the talk of nuclear sharing in NATO, the supranational aspirations of the European community, and the EEC's agricultural common market still in trouble, De Gaulle might conceivably suspect that these postwar arrangements would keep the French more in check than they would the Germans. Compared with this prospect--so at variance with De Gaulle's insistence on French independence and preeminence--several things might look preferable to him: everyone once more agitated about the Germans, Washington more wedded to Bonn--and therefore more in control of it, or conceivably even, German reunification--provided this could be bought with demilitarization.

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(d) If, as seems likely, there can be no permanent settlement of the future of the Alliance apart from some settlement of the future organization of Europe, there is also the question of what impact the present crisis will have in that direction. The Common Market has just emerged from the other De Gaulle - inspired crisis which demonstrated, if anything, that all six of its members would be loath to see the EEC go. But, it is hard to imagine how the six can remain at harmony on the economic-political questions involved in the EEC while they are completely at odds on the question of their mutual defense. There is here again the key question of Britain's future role. However unlikely the prospect might now seem, if the Wilson government should announce suddenly an intention to sign the EEC treaty forthwith, not only would there be a completely new situation in Europe, but there would be one in NATO as well.

(e) Finally, it must be wondered how Moscow will ultimately view these gyrations in the West. So far, at least, Moscow is obviously pleased that there is trouble, Soviet officials and propaganda have hinted at the possibility of a French-Soviet non-aggression pact, and Ambassador Zorin has suggested that in the wake of NATO's disappearance the Warsaw Pact might disappear as well. On the other hand, the Russians can scarcely view with equanimity any risk of "unleashing" the Germans, and they must know that without general acquiescence there is unlikely to be any settlement of either the European security or German reunification questions. Hence, the view that De Gaulle may be less interesting to Moscow in June than he might have been, but hence also, the concern his trip will arouse. This may in fact be the main import of the present crisis--that it may compel us all to face up shortly to questions which heretofore seemed likely to demand answers, at the earliest, some years from now.

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